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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000040

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SUBJECT: (CORRECTED COPY) HOLY SEE: VISIT OF SPANISH FOREIGN
MINISTER

VATICAN 00000040 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'affaires a.i.,
EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Vatican and Spanish contacts describe the recent visit to the Holy See of Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos as a success which improved the tone of the bilateral dialogue. Main topics included the forthcoming papal visit to Valencia, church/state relations in Spain, and the Alliance of Civilizations. Moratinos quietly sought a papal audience but did not obtain one. End summary.

¶2. (C) Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos visited the Holy See February 17, meeting with senior Vatican officials for about an hour and a half. At the request of the Holy See, the meeting was limited to three per side, with the Holy See participants including Cardinal Angelo Sodano (Secretary of State), Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo (Sostituto), and Msgr. Paolo Gualtieri -- equivalent respectively to Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Spain desk officer. Charge d'affaires discussed the visit with Luis Belzuz de los Rios, DCM of the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See, while Poloff got a separate readout from Gualtieri.

Spanish perspective

¶3. (C) Belzuz de los Rios said the Moratinos visit originated thanks to the efforts of the papal nuncio in Spain, Archbishop Monteiro, and was the first official visit by Moratinos. He characterized the visit as "very friendly" and one which marked a change of attitude in the bilateral dialogue. There were three principal topics of discussion: the upcoming papal visit, church/state relations, and the Alliance of Civilizations.

-- Papal Visit: set for July 8-9 of this year in Valencia, the visit could also include Madrid and/or Javier (birthplace of St. Francis Xavier). It comes in response to the king's invitation of last September. Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, head of the Pontifical Council for the Family, will play a prominent role in setting up the visit and the global conference on the family which will occur at that time.

-- Church/State: Belzuz said the two sides agreed to "focus on the future" rather than arguing over the past. He noted that despite legislation permitting gay marriage, only 150 have occurred so far (note: the NYT says 400); since the real issue for the Church is protection of the family, the low number of gay marriages suggests that perhaps a modus vivendi can be reached. Church finances were also discussed, since the government of Spain contributes a subsidy of 20 million euros per year to help cover annual Church costs of 150 million euros.

Only 30 percent of Spanish taxpayers now opt to contribute to the Church via the optional donation when filing their returns, down from 43% when this provision was introduced at the time of the bilateral concordat in 1979; the government is considering raising the percentage from 0.5 percent to 0.8 percent, similar to the Italian model. Another issue involves the Church's exemption from value added tax in Spain, a possible violation of EU rules; Belzuz thought Portugal had successfully resolved a similar situation. Finally, the status of teaching of religion in public schools was discussed. In sum, said Belzuz, all such matters appear to be of a technical nature and eminently resolvable.

-- Alliance of Civilizations: unfortunately there was little time left to discuss this after the above topics were covered, according to Belzuz. The Holy See favors the initiative but reserves the right to speak publicly on the matter as it is being developed.

¶4. (C) Belzuz said that Moratinos had hoped to see Pope Benedict XVI; this had been raised orally by the ambassador with the Sostituto (normally a diplomatic note is required) but without success. This is interesting in light of the fact that both former PM Aznar and his party successor Rajoy managed to obtain private audiences in January of this year; Belzuz observed that both of these had been arranged through separate channels and did not involve his embassy.

Holy See perspective

¶5. (C) Gualtieri told us that he had been initially apprehensive about the visit, having read that Moratinos might raise the possibility of revising the concordat -- which did not arise. He said Moratinos made no mention of his interest in a papal audience. The Holy See was encouraged by Spain's position on the issues of church financing, the education law, and the value added tax. Like Belzuz, Gualtieri felt there had been a genuine improvement in tone between the two sides.

¶6. (C) Gualtieri confirmed Vatican interest in the Alliance of
VATICAN 00000040 002.2 OF 002

Civilizations but said more detail would be needed before the Holy See would comment further. On other issues, he added that the Holy See saw room for cooperation on issues such as immigration and "excessive populism in Latin America".

¶7. (C) Comment: Embassy notes the continuing strict observance by the Holy See of its rule that Benedict XVI (in contrast to his predecessor) will only grant official audiences to heads of state and heads of government. Our senior European diplomatic colleagues here were not surprised by the refusal in this case and did not interpret it as a slight to the government of Spain. On the other hand, the private audiences granted to Aznar and Rajoy would seem to be indications of the Pope's favor; although the rules are somewhat looser for private audiences than for official ones, it remains true that the vast majority of papal audiences are granted to religious figures rather than political ones.

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